



CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

Modernizing Delta Conveyance Infrastructure Q&A

1. Why do we need modernized infrastructure in the Delta?

Rain and snowmelt from the Sierra Nevada through the Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay Delta supplies drinking water to 27 million people in Northern and Southern California and supports 750,000 acres of irrigated farmland. Water infrastructure in the Delta is highly vulnerable to earthquake and sea level rise. According to the United States Geological Survey, there's a 72% chance a 6.7 or greater magnitude earthquake occurring in the Bay Area by 2043 that could cause levees in the Delta to fail, crippling the state's ability to deliver clean water. As sea levels continue to rise, the Delta will be faced with increasing saltwater intrusion into the inner Delta, which threatens clean water supplies that flow through the Delta.

Clear, objective science shows us that these are real, serious threats. We need to take action now to upgrade Delta infrastructure, recognizing that this process will take years to make these improvements.

2. What is the impact of climate change on Delta water supplies?

The best and most recent scientific data have led the California Ocean Protection Council to recommend that projects with a lifespan beyond 2050 be built to withstand 10 feet of sea level rise by 2100. A reliable underground conveyance system is needed to move high flows from the northern portion of the Delta, which is over 15 feet above sea level, to the point that it can be exported to water systems in the Bay Area, Central Valley and Southern California. This will protect freshwater for use by 27 million Californians.

As sea levels continue to rise, the California Delta will be inundated with increasing water levels and salinity, which can dramatically alter and harm fragile ecosystems as well as water supply. The increase in sea level rise, combined with a projected shift in winter precipitation from snow to rain, will create massive challenges for the existing south Delta pumping facilities and the vulnerable levee system. Without proper upgrades and investments, the science clearly shows that Delta communities will be under grave threat from increased salinity that will contaminate their drinking and irrigation water, as well as catastrophic flooding risks. Vast expanses of Delta farmland and communities already sit below sea level. Climate change will dramatically increase the risks for these communities which, coupled with seismic risk, makes the situation urgent.

3. Why doesn't the state just invest more in local projects like recycling and desalination?

Under Governor Newsom's leadership, California is working to develop a broad new approach that focuses on securing safe and resilient water supplies, reducing flood risks, and restoring and maintaining healthy waterways. This broad water resilience portfolio will likely prioritize conservation, recycling, groundwater management, and much more, which will build the resilience of local water systems across the state. At the same time, the Sacramento and San Joaquin River systems—which rely on runoff from most of the Sierra Nevada mountain range—provide a critical water supply for much of the state. Planning a

future for California while not protecting these water supplies from growing risks is dangerous and not advisable.

4. What's happening with WaterFix?

Governor Newsom recently directed his state agencies to develop a portfolio approach to make California's water supplies climate resilient. This strategy will build local resilience across the state and is appropriately paired with a single tunnel, smaller capacity project. Under the Governor's direction, the state is formally withdrawing pursuit of the proposed twin-tunnel WaterFix project. The state is withdrawing all approvals made in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act and the federal and California Endangered Species Acts, as well as the water rights petition in front of the State Water Resources Control Board. The state will begin environmental permitting, engineering and stakeholder engagement to pursue a single tunnel solution to modernize Delta conveyance.

5. What are the details of the new proposed conveyance project? What is the process for a new environmental review under CEQA?

The new approach to modernized Delta conveyance centers on a single tunnel, smaller capacity project. This new approach will allow us to develop a project that incorporates the latest in science and engineering, as well as updated information to minimize impacts. The Department of Water Resources (DWR) will begin a new environmental review process in compliance with CEQA and will ensure that process is open to public engagement. Local input and active engagement will be critical to ensuring a solution that meets the project objectives.

6. Will Delta communities be involved in this new approach?

Yes. Participation and collaborative problem solving will be critical to our success. The Newsom administration wants to engage with Delta communities to hear their ideas and concerns. The administration will also reach out to legislators, state agencies and other policymakers and continue a public dialogue that will allow any Californian engaged in water policy to hear the options and provide input. Our agencies are committed to making the public, especially the Delta community, a part of this new strategy to prepare the state for climate change.

There will also be many opportunities for public input as a part of the planning and environmental review process for Delta conveyance. Their voices, input and active engagement will be critical to ensuring a solution that will protect water supply reliability, but in a way that minimizes impact and cost and maximizes overall benefit.

7. What is the Delta Conveyance Authority and what is its role going forward?

The Delta Conveyance Design and Construction Authority (DCA) is a joint powers authority created by the public water agencies that have committed to design and construction of a modernized Delta conveyance project. As a public agency subject to the Brown Act, all of its meetings are open to the public and its materials are available for public review

DWR will oversee the planning effort and will be directly responsible for implementing the environmental compliance activities. The DCA will conduct engineering and design activities to support environmental planning, with oversight by DWR.

There is a significant amount of engineering and field work needed to support environmental planning and permitting. Examples of the work include land surveys to help map alternatives, geotechnical work and coordination with local communities.

Additionally, Governor Newsom is committed to a more transparent and collaborative process with Delta stakeholders to better communicate the impacts and to work together to explore new ideas for addressing these issues. This means doing more engineering work in the next few years than has been done in the past. As with all the work conducted by the DCA, this will require close management—with oversight by DWR—of budgets and schedules, invoice processing, systems development, risk management, document management and transparent reporting.

8. How will the state ensure that water supplies are protected for local communities, agriculture and threatened and endangered fish in the Delta?

DWR's ability to divert from the Delta is regulated by the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB), which sets parameters for protections of beneficial uses in the Delta. The department has met those parameters in all but the most extreme circumstances. The SWRCB's regulations are in the process of being updated—through the Water Quality Control Plan and the Voluntary Agreements—in order to better balance use of the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers. Once finalized these standards will help govern how Delta conveyance and other infrastructure is managed.

9. Why is Delta conveyance important for disadvantaged communities in the state?

The State Water Project provides the most affordable supply of clean drinking water available in the state. Many communities served by the project have populations that are considered economically disadvantaged. The largest water purveyor in the State Water Project is the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, where more than a third of its service area—and more than 6 million people—live in disadvantaged communities. Public water agencies must maintain affordable water rates for these families. At the same time, the state recognizes that the Delta region is home to disadvantaged communities as well, which need secure access to clean water supplies.

10. Is the federal government involved with this new project?

The Bureau of Reclamation will continue to be a partner in the coordinated operations of the Central Valley Project and the State Water Project and they will assess their interest in participating in the new proposed project in coming months. The federal fishery agencies have an important role to play in implementing oversight to ensure the project complies with the Endangered Species Act, as does the Army Corps of Engineers with regard to the Clean Water Act.

11. Is the state still addressing the co-equal goals required by the Delta Reform Act?

Yes. The Delta Reform Act, and the co-equal goals, will continue to guide efforts to modernize conveyance infrastructure in the Delta. The project's objectives are to provide a more reliable water supply while protecting, restoring, and enhancing the Delta ecosystem—including minimizing effects on fish, reducing unnatural reverse flow conditions, and maintaining water quality standards. This will be consistent with the Delta Reform Act's directive that the coequal goals shall be achieved in a manner that protects and enhances the unique cultural, recreational, natural resource, and agricultural values of the Delta as an evolving place.

12. Is the Newsom Administration open to innovative ideas?

Yes. Decades of study, coupled with updated understanding about sea level rise, make it clear that conveyance in the Delta must be modernized. At the same time, this new approach provides an opportunity to engage with stakeholders and directly address their concerns about Delta conveyance—specifically to avoid and minimize the impacts that concern Delta communities the most. There are four areas for innovation:

- First is in the development of the Water Resilience Strategy, where other water management innovations can complement Delta-specific strategies.
- Second is in opening a discussion to innovative ideas about how to protect Delta water quality and strengthen levee protection.
- Third is in advancing the engineering and design work on the proposed project to a point that we can work with Delta communities to ground-truth mitigation strategies to minimize and avoid potential impacts from construction and operation for issues like recreation, traffic and noise.
- And fourth is in seeking Delta residents' input on a Community Benefits Fund to support, protect and enhance the Delta as an evolving place.

13. How much does this change cost? Who pays for DWR's new planning effort and the assistance of the DCA?

Modernization of Delta conveyance will be funded by the public water agencies—and their ratepayers—who utilize and benefit from the conveyance infrastructure. It will not be funded through the state's general fund nor will it be funded by California's taxpayers. The cost of the project will be determined once a new cost estimate is developed. It will be significantly less expensive than the previously proposed project given its smaller single tunnel design, and therefore more affordable and feasible to implement.